I personally avoided Magic: The Gathering (and all trading card games) for its first 25 years as a perceived “money pit” with a “pay to win” aspect. Two focus questions:

– What changed my perceptions of MTG?
– Through my learning experiences, what do I recommend as the highest value purchases and best resources for the beginner?
The Perception: Standard Format

Source: https://www.mtggoldfish.com/metagame/standard#paper 8/26/2020
The Perception: Modern Format

## Modern Metagame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deck Type</th>
<th>Key Cards</th>
<th>Meta %</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uro Piles</strong></td>
<td>Uro, Titan of Nature's Wrath, Growth Spiral, Path to Exile</td>
<td>10.24%</td>
<td>$1,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blitz</strong></td>
<td>Manamorphose, Monastery, Swiftspear, Soul-Scar Mage</td>
<td>6.82%</td>
<td>$334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gruul Midrange</strong></td>
<td>Lightning Bolt, Seasoned Pyromancer, Arbor Elf</td>
<td>5.51%</td>
<td>$599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Azorius Control</strong></td>
<td>Path to Exile, Opt, Stoneforge Mystic</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
<td>$1,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lurrus Aggro</strong></td>
<td>Lurrus of the Dream-Den, Lightning Bolt, Thoughtseize</td>
<td>4.99%</td>
<td>$581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Burn</strong></td>
<td>Lava Spike, Lightning Bolt, Monastery, Swiftspear</td>
<td>4.99%</td>
<td>$465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tron</strong></td>
<td>Karn Liberated, Ancient Stirrings, Expedition Map</td>
<td>3.94%</td>
<td>$578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eldrazi Tron</strong></td>
<td>Thought-Knot Seer, Karn, the Great Creator, Expedition Map</td>
<td>3.94%</td>
<td>$612</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [https://www.mtggoldfish.com/metagame/modern#paper](https://www.mtggoldfish.com/metagame/modern#paper) 8/26/2020
The Perception: Commander Format
The Perception: Legacy Format

Legacy Metagame

**Temur Delver**
Deliver of Secrets
Brainstorm
Force of Will
- Decks: 40
- Meta %: 13.79%
- Price: $4,136

**Snowko**
Oko, Thief of Crowns
Arcum's Astrolabe
Brainstorm
- Decks: 23
- Meta %: 7.93%
- Price: $3,135

**Elves**
Elvish Visionary
Glimpse of Nature
Green Sun's Zenith
- Decks: 17
- Meta %: 5.86%
- Price: $4,746

**Hogaak**
Bloodghast
Hogaak, Arisen Necropolis
Bridge from Below
- Decks: 13
- Meta %: 4.48%
- Price: $3,374

**Lands**
Life from the Loam
Crop Rotation
Mox Diamond
- Decks: 12
- Meta %: 4.14%
- Price: $5,721

**Dark Depths**
Dark Depths
Crop Rotation
Lotus Petal
- Decks: 11
- Meta %: 3.79%
- Price: $2,366

**Mono-Green Clou...**
Primeval Titan
Thought-Knot Seer
Grim Monolith
- Decks: 9
- Meta %: 3.10%
- Price: $2,485

**Eldrazi Stompy**
Chalice of the Void
Thought-Knot Seer
Reality Smasher
- Decks: 9
- Meta %: 3.10%
- Price: $1,275

Source: [https://www.mtggoldfish.com/metagame/legacy#paper](https://www.mtggoldfish.com/metagame/legacy#paper) 8/26/2020
The Perception: Vintage Format

Vintage Metagame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deck</th>
<th>Meta %</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underworld Breach</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>$30,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doomsday</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
<td>$31,569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradoxical Outcome</td>
<td>10.48%</td>
<td>$38,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogaak Vine</td>
<td>9.52%</td>
<td>$27,305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Xerox</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
<td>$32,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oath of Druids</td>
<td>7.62%</td>
<td>$34,927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golos Stax</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
<td>$38,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UB</td>
<td>5.71%</td>
<td>$37,121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: https://www.mtggoldfish.com/metagame/vintage#paper 8/26/2020
The Perception: *Expensive!!!*

- Average cost of top 8 popular decks on 8/26/2020 by format:
  - Standard: $345
  - Modern: $681
  - Commander: $904
  - Legacy: $3,375
  - Vintage: $33,552

- "*Magic: The Gathering: Twenty Years, Twenty Lessons Learned*" (head designer Mark Rosewater, GDC 2016; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHHg99hwQGY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHHg99hwQGY))
  - Lesson 18: **Restrictions Breed Creativity**
  - So what’s an easy, restrictive M:TG game format that is low-budget and “breeds creativity?”
One Solution: Pauper Format

## Pauper Metagame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deck</th>
<th>Meta %</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Decks</th>
<th>Meta %</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Decks</th>
<th>Meta %</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skred Faeries</td>
<td>12.84%</td>
<td>$74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.78%</td>
<td>$55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.11%</td>
<td>$36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tron</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mono-Green Sto...</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardu Monarch</td>
<td>7.43%</td>
<td>$41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.43%</td>
<td>$41</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.11%</td>
<td>$36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slivers</td>
<td>6.08%</td>
<td>$45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.41%</td>
<td>$57</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.73%</td>
<td>$52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue-Black Delver</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orzhov Pestilence</td>
<td>4.05%</td>
<td>$31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.05%</td>
<td>$31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.73%</td>
<td>$52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [https://www.mtggoldfish.com/metagame/pauper#paper](https://www.mtggoldfish.com/metagame/pauper#paper) 8/26/2020
One Solution: Pauper Format

- Average cost of top 8 popular decks on 8/26/2020 by format:
  - Standard: $345
  - Modern: $681
  - Commander: $904
  - Legacy: $3,375
  - Vintage: $33,552
  - **Pauper:** $49

- So there’s a common format that isn’t super expensive, but it’s still a lot to pay for a beginner that doesn’t know whether or not they’ll like the game. (i.e. “barrier to entry”)

- Let’s start at the beginning... **how to start learning MTG for free.**

My Quick Reference Online: [https://tinyurl.com/mtg-beginner](https://tinyurl.com/mtg-beginner)
Wizards of the Coast Videos

- Wizards of the Coast (WotC), the company that creates MTG, has simple introductory videos:
  - What is Magic: The Gathering?
  - How to Play Magic: The Gathering
  - How to Build Your First Magic Deck
  - Ways to Play Magic: The Gathering
• Play tutorial games free on Magic: The Gathering Arena:

https://magic.wizards.com/en/mtgarena

– Really free to play – rather than pay, can *play* to earn wildcards to trade in for cards to *build tier 1 standard decks*
– Good, clear interface
– Generous good, *free starter decks* awarded to regular players
First Budget Purchase: **MTG Arena Starter Kit**

- Find your local game stores using [http://locator.wizards.com/](http://locator.wizards.com/)
- Purchase an **MTG Arena Starter Kit** for ~$10
  - Includes two decks (paper & digital) and rules
- Learn on paper and MTG Arena
Want to Protect Your Cards?

• Buy a practical accessory while you’re there: *card sleeves* to protect and preserve your cards.
  – Good brands:
    • [UltraPro Eclipse](#)
    • [Dragon Shield](#)
    • See [Tolarian Community College videos](#) for reviews and recommendations for accessories.
Budget Accessories

• For keeping track of life totals:
  – Free Talisman Games Magic Life Total app: https://talisman.games/products/magic-life-total/
• +1/+1 or -1/-1 counters: small (12mm) d6 dice
• 13.5" x 24" black playmat (~$10)
• Deckboxes (< $2 each)
Budget Format: Pauper

• MTG booster packs generally contain cards of varying rarity, e.g.
  – 1 rare card (or possibly a rare “mythic” rare)
  – 3 uncommon cards
  – 10 common cards
  – 1 token creature
• Often, desirable cards for competitive play are more rare, causing high prices given low supply and high demand.
• **Pauper format**: Only cards mass-produced at **common** rarity at any point in MTG history are allowed (with the exception of a **short banlist**).
• Purchase cards individually online, e.g. via [TCGplayer.com](http://tcgplayer.com)
• Advantage: the same joys and challenges of creative deck building with a restriction that lowers the price
• Disadvantage: the same disadvantage shared by all constructed formats...
“Banned and Restricted”

• When WotC sees a card/deck that is getting too much play, they address the problem by strategically banning/restricting play of card(s).

• Whether Legacy or Pauper, one’s favorite deck can be nerfed overnight. This is becoming more common in recent years.

• What if you could decide which cards could be played in your playgroup...

Source: Star City Games https://storage.googleapis.com/scg-static/articles/2020/08/788b1c2e-featured-image-2.png
Budget Format: Cube

• A playgroup builds a balanced set of 360+ cards that support many archetypes (e.g. styles/themes) of play.
• Highlander format (“There can be only one.”) – often, at most one card of each type is permitted.
• Any draft format is permitted, e.g.
  – Form 15-card “booster packs” and traditional draft.
  – Construct a limited 40-card deck from a set of 90 random cards.
• Include about 35 basic lands in each color for deck building for 8 players.
• My guide to MTG cube resources: https://tinyurl.com/mtg-cube-resources
Example: **Card Kingdom Starter Cube**

**Card Kingdom Starter Cube**

Nothing is more fun than drafting a Cube, but building a Cube can be hard and expensive. That's why we created the Card Kingdom Starter Cube! This Cube contains 360 cards (excluding basic lands) and was created with one thing in mind: FUN! Our Cube is filled with fun draft archetypes and exciting bombs to get you started on your own personal Cube. Use this as your base, and add or swap cards as you see fit!

*Includes 35 of each basic land and comes in two custom Card Kingdom Blue boxes with enough Black Ultra Pro Gloss Sleeves for the whole kit!*

All cards included are NM/EX condition.

**Current Cube List**

*Note: Different versions are created in bulk and periodically sell out until the next version is created. It’s worth the wait!*

$99.99

Sorry, one or more styles of this item are out of stock.

🔗 Restock Notice
Latest Card Kingdom Starter Cube List: [https://cubecobra.com/cube/list/9t9](https://cubecobra.com/cube/list/9t9)

### Card Kingdom Starter Cube 2.3 (360 Card Legacy Cube)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Table View</th>
<th>Overview</th>
<th>List</th>
<th>Playtest</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Blog</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### White (54)
- Doomed Traveler
- Gideon's Lawkeeper
- Hunted Witness
- Loyal Sentry
- Soldier of the Pantheon
- Toolcraft Exemplar
- Aethergoede Miner
- Arashin Cleric
- Azorius Arrester
- Countless Gears Renegade
- Gearshift Ace
- Glory-Bound Initiate
- Impassioned Orator
- Impostor of the Sixth Planar Outpost
- Leonin of the Lost Pride
- Stormfront Pegasus
- Attended Knight
- Eidolon of Inspiration
- Forbidding Spirit
- Master Trinketeer
- Roc Egg
- Solemn Recruit

#### Blue (54)
- Augur of Bolas
- Elusive Spellfist
- Hypnotic Sprite
- Mystic Archaeologist
- Passwall Adept
- Sigiled Starfish
- Sky Theater Strix
- Stinging Lionfish
- Aloros, Enraptured
- Cloudkin Seer
- Frost Lynx
- Jassien Thief
- Man-o'-War
- Na'id of Hidden Caves
- Wavebreak Hippocamp
- Archaeomancer
- Mist Raven
- Nibilis of Frost
- Guardian of Tazeem
- Mnemonic Wall
- Aethersphinx
- Sage-Eye Avengers

#### Black (54)
- Grasping Scoundrel
- Grim Physician
- Pilfering Imp
- Discordant Piper
- Doomed Dissenter
- Lampad of Death's Vigil
- Misericrom Mummy
- Mire Triton
- Order of Midnight
- Ravenous Rats
- Reassembling Skeletron
- Scrapheap Scrounger
- Crow of Dark Tidings
- Crypt Rats
- Gorging Vulture
- Nantuko Husk
- Necromancer's Assistant
- Nighthowler
- Phyxren Goulh
- Waruteye Witch
- Graveshifter
- Mindwack Demon

#### Red (54)
- Fanatical Firebrand
- Ghitu Lavaraner
- Goblin Motivator
- Jackal Pup
- Blood Aspirant
- Burning Prophet
- Careless Celebrant
- Dark-Dweller Oracle
- Kari Zev, Skyship Raider
- Klin Fiend
- Rimrock Knight
- Speedway Fanatic
- Underworld Rage-Hound
- Ahr-Crop Invader
- Anax, Hardened in the Storm
- Bogardan Dragonheart
- Dreamstalker Manticore
- Smelt-Ward Minetaur
- Stampede Rider
- Weaver of Lightning
- Akoum Firebird
- Arena Trickster

#### Green (54)
- Avacyn's Pilgrim
- Chainweb Arachnir
- Llanowar Elves
- Oviya Fashiri, Sage Lifebinder
- Sedge Scorpion
- Deathcap Cultivator
- Ilysan Pryors
- Kronch Wrangler
- Nesslian Hornbeetle
- Resilient Khenra
- Satyr Wayfinder
- Snarespinners
- Whisperer of the Wilds
- Woodland Champion
- Boon Satyr
- Grisapur Guide
- Golgari Brownscale
- Loathsome Chimera
- Thrashing Brontodon
- Wild Beastmaster
- Arastra of the Endless Reach
- Deadbridge Goliath

#### Multicolored (40)
- Monomental Blink
- Turn to Mist
- Elite Guardmage
- Lavinia of the Tenth
- Dimir (4)
- Atris, Oracle of Half-True
- Silumgar's Command
- Lochmere Serpent
- Rags // Riches

#### Colorless (26)
- Gingerbrute
- Crashing Drawbridge
- Lesser Masticore
- Sorcerer's Broom
- Pilgrim's Eye
- Skyscanner
- Akroan Horse
- Meteor Golem

#### Lands (24)
- Azorius Guildgate
- Tranquil Cove
- Dimir (2)
- Dimir Guildgate
- Dismal Backwater
- Rakdos (2)
- Bloodfell Caves
- Rakdos Guildgate
- Artifact (18)
- Scrapbling Claws
- Soul-Guide Lantern
- Amorphous Axe
- Captain's Claws
- Fleetfeather Sandals
- Heart-Piercing Bow
- Key to the City
- Sky Skiff
- Wings of Hubris
- Aethersphere Harvester
- Cultivator's Caravan
- Fountain of Ichor
- Fortify the Weak
- Gruul (2)
- Gruul Guildgate
- Rugged Highlands
- Selesnya (2)
- Blossoming Sands
- Selesnya Guildgate
- Orzhov (2)
- Orzhov Guildgate
- Scoured Barrens
- Golgari (2)
- Golgari Guildgate
- Guiltcask (3)
Artisan/Peasant Doubleton Set Cube

(MTG Arena C/U) (All C/U) (2x copies)

- Sets, released every few months, are designed around commons and uncommons, since they’re 93% of the cards opened in booster packs.
- 2 copies of each booster common and uncommon in a set often create a great budget cube experience. Example: M21 Artisan Doubleton Cube
- Lots with 4x commons and uncommons often sell for ~$50, so think of these as 2x ~$25 small cubes!
- Adding about 35 copies of each basic land (~2.5 cents each in bulk) plus bulk penny sleeves adds ~$10.
M21 Artisan Doubleton Cube

This is an M21 artisan doubleton set cube, suitable for (1) easy collection and play in MTG Arena, and (2) relatively inexpensive purchase in paper.

In MTG Arena, completion of daily quests and 4x wins per day earns enough gold to quick draft 2x of all commons and uncommons for 5000 gold/draft in a reasonably short period of time.
Online: Draft on dr4ft.info

Play drafted decks on MTG Arena, untap.in, Cockatrice, etc.
Budget MTG Summary

• Try for free: **MTG Arena**
• Learn with a friend: **MTG Arena Starter Kit**
• Learn a lot about MTG through cube drafting for as low as $12.50 per person in a playgroup of 8 with a **CK Starter Cube**.
• Enjoy an MTG set design with an **Artisan/Peasant Doubleton Set Cube**
• Continue to learn online through **MTG Arena** play and many free **YouTube** and **Twitch** videos.
Addendum

• Gettysburg College Game Club Recommendations:
  – **The Commander’s Quarters**: Build 100-card commander format decks around your commander card for $25.
  – **Budget MTG Decks**: Build decks in a variety of formats with all non-commander cards < $1.